DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 394 IR 054 957

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TITLE Family Literacy. Information Forum Publication #5.
INSTITUTION Utah State Library, Salt Lake City.
PUB DATE Jun 93
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Literacy; *Childrens Libraries; *Family Programs; Financial Support; Intergenerational Programs; Library Services; *Literacy Education; Outreach Programs; Program Development; Public Libraries; *Reading Programs; Story Reading; Story Telling; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Family Literacy; Library Services and Construction Act; *Utah

ABSTRACT

In the most general sense, family literacy is any intergenerational program that focuses on family reading. One of the important goals is to break the cycle of illiteracy, and another is to promote reading and encourage families to enrich their lives through the shared experience of reading. The Utah State Library has offered literacy grants with Library Services and Construction Act Title I funds since 1985, targeting adult literacy programs. These funds could also be used for family literacy programs. A sampling is presented of the kinds of projects public libraries have already undertaken to further family literacy. These include: (1) a "Babies and Books" program to make parents aware of the importance of reading to their children, (2) literacy kits for children and adults, (3) programs aimed at adults, (4) storytimes, (5) storytelling, (6) book talks, (7) workshops for older children, (8) building on adult literacy programs, (9) outreach to other agencies, (10) festivals, (11) promotionals, and (12) purchasing materials. (Contains 6 references.) (SLD)

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FAMILY LITERACY

By

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and
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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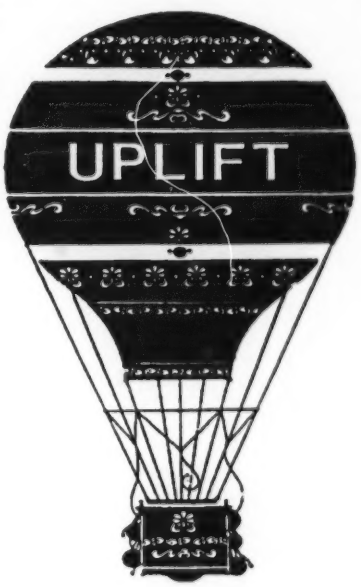

Information Forum Publication
#5

June 1993

Published by the
Utah State Library Division
Department of Community and Economic Development

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Published by the
Department of Community and Economic Development
Joseph A. Jenkins, Executive Director

Utah State Library Division
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2150 South 300 West
Salt Lake City, Utah 84115-2579

June, 1993

WHAT IS FAMILY LITERACY?

While the term "family literacy" is relatively new, the concepts behind it are not. In the most general sense, family literacy is any intergenerational program that focuses on family reading. One of the important goals of family literacy is to break the cycle of illiteracy. When parents are poor readers, their children are more likely to follow the same pattern.

Another significant component of family literacy is the wish to promote reading and to encourage families to make their lives richer through **shared** reading experiences. Values, concerns, cultural identity, ideas, and just the pleasure of each other's company is shared. Aliteracy (when people who can read choose not to) is addressed. In family literacy programs adults act as a model for positive reading behavior. Children perceive reading to be of value when they see adults gaining benefits and pleasure from it.

WHY FAMILY LITERACY?

In Becoming a Nation of Readers, the Commission on Reading stated that, *"the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children."* Family literacy programs strive to help family members help children develop pre-literacy (reading readiness) and literacy skills. The importance of surrounding children with an environment full of books and other printed material is emphasized.

Literacy begins at home. In First Teachers, the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy noted that family literacy programs *"reflect the belief that the role of the parent in the educational development of the child is critical -- that parents are a child's first and most influential teachers."* Family literacy programs encourage parents to engage in language activities with their children, such as helping them make a scrapbook from letters of the alphabet or listening to them while they tell a story they have made up themselves.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress observed what has long been suspected, that *"youngsters whose parents are functionally illiterate are twice as likely as their peers to be functionally illiterate."* For many parents who are illiterate, the desire to help their children learn to read and to do well in school is a strong motivating factor in learning to read themselves. Family literacy programs can build on this desire, helping both parent and child.

WHY THE LIBRARY?

Libraries are no strangers to family literacy activities. For example, in 1988 the California State Library began a Families for Literacy Program (FFL) to provide libraries that already receive California Literacy Campaign funds, for adult literacy programs, with added funds to initiate pre-literacy programs for the families of adult learners. The minimum services to be provided with FFL funding include many activities that libraries have traditionally undertaken as mainstays of their programming efforts. Introducing families to the library's resources and services; providing storytelling, word games, and other reading-oriented activities for families; teaching parents how to select books and why to read aloud to children; and helping parents to gain access to books on topics such as parenting and health are activities that many libraries have been doing for many years.

The Utah State Library has offered literacy grants with LSCA (Library Services and Construction Act) Title I funds since 1985. Those funds have been targeted for adult literacy programs. However, those funds could be used for family literacy programs.

Libraries are uniquely positioned to encourage children to enjoy reading. Many children view reading at school as stressful "work". At the library, children can explore their individual reading interests in a relaxed environment.

The public library, with its mission to help all members of the community become life-long learners, is the logical focal point when community agencies want to collaborate their efforts to encourage family literacy. For example, Washington County Library held a "Forum on Literacy" which brought three or four literacy programs in their area together to discuss reading problems in their county. Unlike many agencies which serve a specific clientele, the public library serves people of all ages, all incomes, and all educational levels. Who better to bring diverse community agencies together in a common goal of encouraging literacy than the public library?

EXAMPLES OF FAMILY LITERACY PROJECTS

Here are just a sampling of the kinds of projects that public libraries throughout the state and across the nation have undertaken. The ways in which libraries work with their communities and other agencies to promote family literacy are too many and too varied to list them all here.

BABIES AND BOOKS

An attempt is made to make parents aware of the importance of reading to their children as soon as possible -- at birth or even before. New parents are provided with information about the library, as well as with tips on how and what to read to babies. Often coupons are provided to be redeemed at the library for books. Frequently these packets are distributed at the hospital. Salt Lake City Public Library works with Holy Cross Hospital in providing parents with a baby's "first library card," a coupon that can be exchanged at the library for a "real" library card.

Some librarians feel that providing information about the library and reading to parents in prenatal classes is more beneficial than trying to provide information at the hospital. Before the baby is born parents are more relaxed, less harried, and have more time to think about their baby's future.

Libraries also collaborate with other appropriate agencies to provide "reading readiness" information to such groups as unwed mothers and teen mothers either during their pregnancy or after the baby is born.

LITERACY KITS

These take many forms. Kits include items such as books, activity sheets, puppets, flannel board stories, recordings, stuffed animals, videos, and fingerplays. The materials are focused around central themes to be distributed to such groups as parents, day care providers, and teachers. Often the kits are designed with a specific adult audience and child age group in mind, such as "theme concept kits for loan to parents of young children" or "storytelling boxes circulated to teachers of children from birth to grade 3."

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

The goal here is to educate adults so that they, in turn, can enhance the lives of children. Example programs include: parenting and child care; how to select books; how and why to read aloud; how to get involved in a child's education; developing good reading habits; and sharing family traditions. It is often useful to tailor the adult program or tutoring to meet a specific daily life requirement such as reading the daily newspaper, completing a job application, reading instructions for assembling a cabinet, or reading a recipe. Often, while parents are attending a program, a concurrent program (such as a storytime) is provided for their children. Programs may also target adults other than parents such as teachers, day care providers, and grandparents. The focus audience might also be a particular adult group, such as teen mothers or single fathers.

Weber County Library offers parents a series of four, four-week workshops with the first week being an introduction to the library and age-appropriate materials, week two a presentation on self-esteem and family literacy, week three how to make reading fun, and week four parental involvement in learning.

STORYTIMES

Building pre-literacy and literacy skills is the goal. Books are shared, as well as games, crafts, fingerplays, songs, etc. A specific child age group may be targeted, such as toddlers, children ages 3-5, or children ages 6-8. Providing traditional storytimes for children in day care centers, hospitals, or shelters is just one way libraries can work with other agencies. Sometimes the librarian goes to the children, while other times the children come to the library.

Springville Public Library has assembled "storytime kits" designed for use in the library's preschool storytimes and for check-out to preschool day care providers. Included in the kits are a variety of items: puppets, pop-up books, career hats, craft and activity ideas.

Often a storytime for children is offered at the same time as a program for adults, thus solving babysitting problems for adults. Storytimes which adults and children attend together, in which they learn to interact with each other and share language activities, are popular. Often free books are given to the participating adults or children.

STORYTELLING

Listening to language is an integral part of literacy. In storytelling, the important skill of listening is encouraged and rich oral traditions are kept alive. Librarians do their own storytelling, contract with professional storytellers, or invite people in the community (adults and/or children) to share their stories. Storytelling workshops for adults and/or children are sometimes provided.

BOOK TALKS

Specific books are introduced to a target group. Examples of book talks include: an adult visiting schools to share segments of his/her favorite books; an adult leading a series of book discussions in which the children have all read the same books and come together to talk about them; and a librarian sharing child care books with parents.

WORKSHOPS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

The goal of these workshops is to instill family literacy skills in older children. Example workshops include teaching children how to: tell stories; write and illustrate their own book; and make puppets.

BUILDING ON ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

Libraries that already have adult literacy programs broaden their focus to include families. For example, in a "book buddy" project, while the adult literacy student meets with a tutor, their child is paired with another adult who reads to the child. Adult literacy students and their families are often targeted to attend special family literacy programs, such as parenting classes and storytimes, designed especially for them.

OUTREACH TO OTHER AGENCIES

The library works with other agencies such as day care centers, shelters for the homeless or battered women, homes for unwed mothers, and pediatric clinics to provide materials and/or programs. The materials may be books, literacy kits, etc. The programs may be storytimes, parenting programs for adults, etc. Programs and/or materials may be supplied at the library or at the other agency.

FESTIVALS

These events, usually with the primary goal of promoting reading, can last a day, several days, or even months. Often a variety of activities are offered such as storytelling, author and/or illustrator visits, workshops for older children, and programs for adults. Salt Lake City Public Library held a week long "Children's Literacy Conference" which included a celebrity storytime, author visits, children's writing workshops, and a theatrical production of a children's book.

PROMOTIONALS

Use of the library, reading, or literacy in general is promoted. An example might be to promote reading as a "Family Reading Night" (not unlike a family home evening) when family members turn off the T.V. for a night and read together.

Contests for children, such as naming the library goldfish or making bookmarks, are other popular promotionals.

The American Library Association encourages libraries to sponsor a "Night of a Thousand Stars" with local celebrities coming together to read to children or tell stories. Milford Public Library hosted an "All American Read Aloud Day," which over 50% of the community attended, with such local celebrity readers as firemen, county commissioners, school board members, the sheriff, a judge, an author, and a newscaster.

And use the opportunity of sponsoring a booth at the county fair or other such community event to promote reading, literacy, and your library.

PURCHASING MATERIALS

Materials are purchased to enhance existing collections and/or develop new collections. Examples: baby board books are purchased in conjunction with adult programs on how to read to a baby; multiple copies of specific easy readers are purchased to coincide with a librarian's series of book talks to second graders; and books on parenting are purchased for delivery to a home for unwed mothers.

POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCES

The Public Library Services Development Grant may be used for family literacy programs.

LSCA Title I and Title VI funds are available. For Title I grant information, contact the State Library Division's Grants Coordinator. Title I literacy grants are targeted for *adult* literacy programs and grant applications should reflect that as the major goal. For Title VI grant information, contact the U.S. Department of Education.

POSSIBLE PROGRAMMING RESOURCES

For programming and/or materials selection ideas, contact the State Library Division's Children's Consultant.

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